

# Women's Concerns

Report



## Mothers and sons

Mothers and Sons—you see them all around you. As you will see in the following stories and poems, each set of mothers and sons has had a different experience. At the same time the poetry shows our experiences have many similarities. I hope these stories touch your heart and that your understanding of other women who have raised sons will grow.

*Eva M. Hiebert Klink, compiler*



by Ruth Naylor

## Drowned fears

My child is caught  
just beyond the reach of wise adults  
—Out on a rock  
surrounded with swelling tides  
lapping at his foundations  
challenging his courage  
and mine.  
The world seems slowly  
and surely  
submerged.

Then the tide returns to an untroubled sea  
imposing an empty earth  
exposing unmarked sands  
Where new footprints can touch new trails  
into previously explored unknowns.

—And the rock?  
Ah! He was not trapped,  
He was lifted above the waters—  
the danger  
To stand alone  
but on  
safe footing.

**"When I'm a dad, I can  
cook," Logan announced to  
me one day."**

by Mary Alice Ressler

## Raising nonsexist sons

When approaching parenthood, I became more aware of my fears about raising sons. I grew up surrounded by sisters, the fourth child in a family of one son followed by six daughters. Female sibling culture was familiar to me, and I felt confident (however unfounded that was) about parenting a daughter. But sons—that was scary! Would the thoughtful, kind, self-aware sons I wanted to raise be able to cope in our competitive, individualist society? Would I have much support for raising this kind of son? As my sons learned to relate to a still male-dominated world, would they become distant from me?

To raise nonsexist sons, my husband, Gerald, and I decided role modeling has to start at home, and what we *do* would mean more than what we say. Since we were both working fulltime for 10 years of marriage before having children, we had lots of practice dividing chores at home. With the addition of parenting responsibilities and my move to part-time work, chores were negotiated again. Our roles have continued to evolve as our children's needs change. We are now parents of a 10-year-old daughter, Ariel, a 7-year-old son, Patrick, and a 4-year-old son, Logan. Much of our work at home is shared or rotated—caring for our children, cooking, doing dishes, cleaning, packing lunches, writing notes to the teacher, gardening, lawn mowing, making child care arrangements for our children, caring for friends' children and paying bills.

"When I'm a dad, I can cook," Logan announced to me one day recently. This unsolicited comment made me feel our modeling is bearing at least a little fruit! Some chores are claimed by one of us, by choice. I really like

garage sale shopping, where I buy most of our clothes. Gerald is an expert grocery shopper, and usually takes one of our children with him each week. When I fleetingly considered doing the grocery shopping last week, Ariel teased me, "It would take you hours, Mom. You don't know where anything is in the store!" She's right—I've been to the grocery store about five times in the last five years!

Sharing responsibility for child care has not always been easy for me. At times I have needed to work hard at encouraging and supporting Gerald in his parenting decisions and style. I realized my way of caring for children was not the only or even best way, and if I insisted on "my way" our children would not fully experience the delightful, different gifts he brings to parenting. Having a fully involved father, one who can comfort his children when they're hurt or frightened, diaper, dress, bathe, rock and feed them, freely give and receive affection, and help them with homework, is one of the best ways for our sons to learn that nurturing and caring for others is as lifegiving for men as for women.



**"Having a fully involved father, is one of the best ways for our sons to learn that nurturing and caring for others is as life-giving for men as for women."**

**"In our community and neighborhood, I draw the children's attention to men and women in nontraditional roles."**

As our children mature and are given responsibility for chores, they also learn to do a variety of jobs around the house. My sons have always loved cooking with me. What could be more exciting than breaking eggs? Now Patrick is asking to learn to use the sewing machine. I plan to teach him soon. Both Ariel and Patrick are learning to clean the house with us. At age 7, Patrick needs a lot of teaching and supervision to do the job well, but I know this effort will pay off in the long run. I'm determined that my sons (and my daughter) will have the skills needed to maintain a household by the time they leave ours! I think if my sons have the skills to run a household, they will be less likely to expect anyone else to do it for them.

As with chores, Gerald and I have tried not to sex-type our children's play choices. We encourage our sons to have tea parties and to play "dress-up," "daddy" and Playmobil families, as well as to play with such toys as building sets, balls and vehicles. When Patrick, at age 3, asked for nail polish like his sister's, we brushed it on. But when Sunday arrived, we debated if we should remove it before we went to church. Would he be hurt by any comments people made to him? As we'd hoped, friends at church understood that Patrick enjoyed the novelty of his painted fingernails! Gift-giving can also be an opportunity to break out of the girls' toys/boys' toys mold. Ariel recently asked for a Lego set, and Patrick for a Cat's Cradle book (string tricks). We're pretty responsive to these requests.

Gerald and I joke about how quickly we cry when we're moved by something said or done in a worship service, in a movie or at family gatherings. But I'm so glad that he can cry and that our sons can see their father express his feelings without embarrassment. When our sons cry, we are careful to respect the feelings represented and encourage them to express their feelings, just as we do with our daughter.

To counter the many stereotypical male/female roles found in popular culture, I seek out children's books, songs and movies which feature strong, courageous females and nurturing, gentle males. Just as in my own understanding and practice, stories and songs that offer some of the roles I'm looking for also have their foibles.

For example, the impact of one nurturing male character in a story is sometimes diminished in the same story by a less sensitive male character. In *William's Doll*, by Charlotte Zolotow, William enjoys the basketball and train set his

father gives him but tries to make his father understand he wants a doll to love and take care of. In the end, it is William's grandmother, not his father, who understands his longing and gives him the doll he always wanted.

In our community and neighborhood, I draw the children's attention to men and women in nontraditional roles. I'm pleased when the school principal, optometrist, family doctor, athlete on TV or road worker we pass is female, so my children have experience of or personal knowledge of women in these roles. I'm also happy my children know men who are the primary caregivers for their children, see other dads cooking and cleaning up after dinner, and are cared for at times by our male friends.

In our church congregation, Patrick and Logan regularly see women *and* men in preaching, teaching, hospitality and child caregiving roles. I am so thankful our sons are experiencing the freedom of expression of women's and men's gifts that lend such vitality to worship and church life. In addition, worship leaders and preachers often use inclusive language for God's people and for God. We continue this practice at home when reading Bible stories, singing Bible-related songs or talking about God. Learning from an early age that God is broader than gender expands our sons' image of God, I believe. Logan argues with me about this because he's seen pictures of God as a male, he tells me, wearing long white robes. Pictures of God, even if a product of the artist's imagination, are powerful proof for a 4-year-old!

The influences on our sons are many, and it still seems a formidable task to raise nonsexist sons. I am often not the parent I want to be, in this area and others. But I am hopeful, especially with the support of our church family and like-minded friends and their children, that our sons will value and relate to girls and women as people who are equally created and gifted by God.

**Mary Alice Ressler lives in Lititz, Pa. She is an educational therapist in an inpatient psychiatric setting and is active in Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster (Pa.).**

by Ruth Naylor

## Painted philosophic conflict

It's a long way  
From the Sailors' Quarter\*  
To Rijksmuseum  
In Amsterdam

And though the profession  
Of the Quarter  
Was born long before  
Rembrandt van Rijn  
Or his "Jewish Bride,"  
The rebellion of mind  
Against commitment  
To others or Mosaic law  
Is spray painted  
On structures that line  
The streets and canals between.

Red-lighted windows  
Display female merchandise;  
Satisfaction can be purchased  
In just a few moments  
And you'll be free:  
No responsibility; no disease.  
There'll be no cameras  
Or whispers to tell. After all,  
Who reports the consumer  
Who grocery shops  
To fill his appetites?

This poem is a graffiti  
Of its own, but the lines  
Of internal argument  
Were set aside at the museum,  
Not to be publicly splattered—  
Respecting different opinions  
And dignity commanded  
Since civilization began.

Rembrandt picked up my thoughts;  
He had brushed them softly  
Into a wordless masterpiece.  
The Jewish bride is protected,  
Cared for.  
Tenderness is oiled  
Into every line.  
This is the wedding of lives  
Between a man and the woman  
He loves.

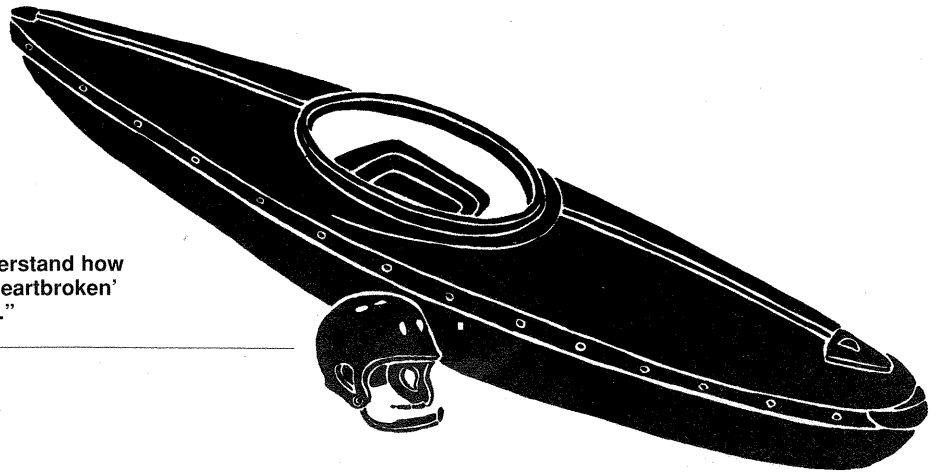
I bought a canvas copy  
For my son.

This poem was written in Europe, says  
Ruth Naylor "while reflecting on how I  
wanted my son to view women." It  
appears in *Born Giving Birth:  
Creative Expressions of Mennonite  
Women*, edited by Mary H.  
Schertz and Phyllis Martens,  
Faith & Life Press, 1991.



\*The Sailors' Quarter in Amsterdam is a "red light" district where government-protected prostitutes ply their trade.

"I now understand how  
the word 'heartbroken'  
came to be."



by Marilyn Kauffman Miller

## A mother's words at the memorial for her son

*Michael Miller was killed in a kayaking accident on the Animas River 30 miles above Durango, Colo., on Mother's Day, 1996. He was 32 years old. He was a high school English teacher in Delores, Colo. Michael was an avid outdoorsman and a poet. His kayak and helmet were recovered in the first few days. Mike's body has been seen but not recovered. The memorial service was held on May 23, 1996, in Boulder, Colo.*

I would like to speak to three audiences: first to our son, Michael; second to you, our family and friends; and third to God, our heavenly parent.

First to Mike:

A week ago Sunday, on May 12, the phone rang. I thought it was you calling to wish me Happy Mother's Day. Instead it was the sheriff from La Plata County, "I'm sorry. I have some bad news for you." It was the news we and all parents dread most to hear.

Mike, you always wanted us to "be real." To speak the truth as we saw it, even if it hurt. The truth right now is that I have experienced some anger the past 11 days. Anger that you didn't pay more attention to our warnings and fears. Anger that you weren't more sensitive to how your risk-taking adventures could effect your family and loved ones.

I know you can take my anger, in fact, you would like it. You would say, "Hey, we're connecting!" Mike, the anger is only a teensy bit of the mountain of feelings I have experienced these past 11 days. The overwhelming feelings have been grief, loss and love for you. These past days we have lived through thousands of memories. Everything from you taking your first bath with Grandma Kauffman, giggling at the delight you showed as you tried to walk on water, even at that young age. To more recent experiences, such as visiting your classroom and witnessing how great a teacher you were and how you cared for your students. I told your father afterward, you were doing just what good pastors do: teaching values, truths and what brings meaning in life.

Mike, you didn't just teach students. You taught me, your mother, much about life and living it to the fullest. I know I will continue to learn from your life in the months ahead. Thanks for the truths you continue to give me.

The last thing I want to say to you is in the title of a children's book we gave you for your great literature shelf: *Love You Forever*. When we entered your home after the accident, we found it, not in your book shelf where you usually kept it, but on your kitchen counter. We hope you read it before you left your home for the last time. We trust you sensed the truth in the words:

*"We'll love you forever,  
We'll like you for always  
As long as we're living,  
Our beloved you'll be."*

Second, I want to say something to you, our family and friends. These past 11 days have been a nightmare. There have been times I thought my chest would break open it was so full of pain. I now understand how the word "heartbroken" came to be. It is only because of faith in God and your care and friendship that we have been able to carry on. I speak for our entire family when I say, "Thank you from the depths of our hearts."

Finally, I want to say something to God. Let us pray.

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of Michael's life. Thank you for all that he gave to us, the humor and joy, the challenges and truth, the unquenchable exuberance for life and love.

I love him with a mother's love. I know your love is even greater. We entrust Michael back to you, his heavenly parent. May he, and all of us, continue to grow in oneness with you. May we sense your unconditional, steadfast, and unfailing love, and may we live it and share it here on earth, as did your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

**Marilyn Kauffman Miller lives in Boulder, Colo., with her husband and daughter. Marilyn attends Boulder Mennonite Church. She is currently serving as director of outreach ministries for GCMC. She was a co-pastor at Arvada Mennonite Church in Arvada, Colo. Marilyn was the church planter of Boulder Mennonite Church.**

by Eva M. Hiebert Klink

## Chosen but . . .

When our daughter was born my husband and I were part of a church that had many discussions about world population growth and how each of us was contributing to that growth. As a result of these discussions we chose to not give birth to any more children but to adopt instead. Part of that choice was that we wanted a boy to complete our family.

The process of being considered for a certain child was complicated by the fact that we moved to Utah after being approved for adoption in Colorado. Because few children were available in our new state we proceeded to try to adopt a child from the Philippines.

We heard about our son, Lorenzo, before he was a year old. He didn't come to be a part of our family until he was 2-and-a-half. Legal procedures move slowly in the Philippines.



Meanwhile we had pictures of Lorenzo, including a set taken when he had an ear infection that made the left side of his face under his chin swollen and red. Pain from this infection was later determined to be the cause of Lorenzo's inability to bond. Unresolved pain can break the bonding that has taken place for a child. When Lorenzo came to the United States, he had a tooth cavity, scabies, infectious warts, a perforated eardrum and worms. He was also in an accident the first month.

I had just completed my undergraduate work in child development. Despite my studies about children from orphanages, I was not prepared for Lorenzo.

He always seemed to be bringing home pencils, rocks, toys and other things that didn't belong to him. We chalked up our problems with Lorenzo to supposed differences between boys and girls or to his having spent those first years in an orphanage.

I knew school was not going to be easy when I had two people waiting for me at the first parent-teacher conference. I learned from that point on to bring my husband, Dave, with me whenever possible. Although it didn't feel good to be a mom who couldn't go to parent-teacher conferences by herself, two sets of ears to hear what was said made a difference in our responses.

During summers it was especially difficult to keep Lorenzo busy and out of trouble. One summer I took a job as a cook at a Girl Scout camp to get away from the trouble. After my return we began therapy. The therapist decided to see only me most of the time. This gave Dave the message that I was the problem and that I was the only one who couldn't get along with Lorenzo.

I attended every class on parenting that I thought could help, and I had a network of friends. I began to realize I needed a different kind of expert to find a solution to the helpless and hopeless feeling I had as a mother to our son.

**"I knew school was not going to be easy when I had two people waiting for me at the first parent-teacher conference."**

---

Dave and I attended classes intended for parents of children who lack bonding. In those two days Dave's eyes were opened to the fact that Lorenzo had almost all the characteristics of an unattached child and I was not the problem. Because unattached children focus so much of their anger and lack of trust on the individual in the mother role, it had seemed as if I were the problem.

Lorenzo and I spent many hours together traveling to and from therapy. I was most involved in the therapeutic process with Lorenzo, although Dave and our daughter were also involved.

Therapy sessions were called "rage therapy." They were hard physically and mentally. An unattached child is filled with hatred for all adults because those in the first two years of their lives didn't take care of them. All the love sent their way after that point just bounces off. As these children rage in therapy, space is made in their hearts for love.

Parenting an unattached child is hard work. We were suspicious when things were missing or items appeared in the house. We had to constantly check on whether he was where he was supposed to be, with only those things that belonged to him, and doing the things he was supposed to. We could not trust him to stay alone in the house or have a key, even during his teen years. We had many confrontations about his unacceptable behavior, including coming home late.

After rage therapy had fulfilled its potential, we took Lorenzo to a neuropsychologist. He confirmed that Lorenzo had above average skills except in three areas: long term facts, decision making and common sense. Brain activity for these are controlled in the area near the left ear where he had his infection as a child. Therapy to remedy the inactivity was useless since Lorenzo obtained tobacco and alcohol, which negated any positive results.

The racism that had been expressed both subtly and openly to Lorenzo as a child was obvious. It continued with law enforcement people in particular. When Lorenzo got in trouble with the law I felt I was more on probation than he was.

When we discovered Lorenzo was just pretending to attend school, we made him leave the house. When he eventually went back to school we allowed him to live with us as long as he was attending school. He graduated from high school and became a U.S. citizen at about the same time. Then he was on his own again.

Through the years of dealing with these problems, we found little support from family, friends and church groups. Someone who hasn't gone through it can't know what it is like to live with an unattached child. It didn't help Lorenzo and my relationship when family were critical of how we were parenting Lorenzo.

A few years have gone by since Lorenzo left home. For about a year we didn't see him often. His job and living situation changed often and quickly. Now he has a steady job where he has worked for over a year, and now we see him quite regularly. He lives with a young woman and her son. The son calls him "daddy," and Lorenzo is a good father. We enjoy being grandparents. He comes over and talks about work problems and possible solutions, his living situation, and plans for the future. He doesn't always like our analyses of a problem but he listens and modifies his reactions.

During Lorenzo's childhood he and I worked as a team in the garden. He learned the basics of gardening and plant care. He likes having house plants. He is working at communicating and spending time with his family. We have the best relationship we've ever had.

**Eva M. Hiebert Klink lives in Fort Collins, Colo., with her husband Dave and daughter Lisa, who has just moved back home. Eva is a member of the Boulder Mennonite Church, where she serves on the worship committee. Eva is currently working in retail sales. She has served as an interim pastor at the Enders Church of the Brethren. Fabric art (quilting) is her inspiration, hobby, work and passion.**

"Stan became aware of the importance of taking a Christian feminist stand before I did because I was basically comfortable with my role."

by Marlene Rufenacht Smucker

## Passing on feminist values to sons

As the sun shone through the bare windows of my rural Ohio church, I was comfortable sitting with the girls my age. Our grandmothers were at the other end of the front benches and our mothers further back. As the singing of the hymn began, the bass and tenor voices from across the aisle blended with the melody. I felt content. Everything was orderly and correct. Everyone knew his or her place.

Boys and girls met in separate Sunday School classes by the time we were in junior high school. These separations enforced the different roles of males and females in the church. For many these roles were reinforced at home and on the farm. Boys worked in the fields and barn while girls helped mother in the house and garden.

Here I sensed my family differed from the norm. In our family there were only three children, and the first two were girls. Dad needed a tractor driver so I happily filled this role for many years. Dad praised my sister and me for being good farmers.

I would describe the power in our home as equal or even matriarchal because both of my grandmothers and my mother were strong women. My mother and her mother both worked outside the home for many years, which was not a common practice at that time. This shifted responsibilities around and made us all more versatile in helping get chores done both in the house and out on the farm.

After Stan and I were married we had three sons, born in the '60s. They did not grow up in a traditional ethnic Mennonite community. We lived in African American urban communities where Stan was a pastor from the time the oldest was born until the second son graduated from high school. After the youngest started kindergarten, I became a



nursing student at the University of Oklahoma. In this setting we developed an awareness of the need to live and teach equal rights of all persons, regardless of race, age or sex.

Stan became aware of the importance of taking a Christian feminist stand before I did because I was basically comfortable with my role. Although I did not feel held back or alienated because of my gender I became aware that many women were not so fortunate, and I chose to become an advocate for those who suffer discrimination.

Values are taught not only in words but in actions and lifestyle. Stan and I worked at having a marriage of equality. We made decisions together, with each of us making an effort to understand the other's needs. This did not always happen without conflict, and the boys heard lots of open discussion.

Our sons never saw only one of us as "boss," however I had the ultimate privilege of choosing (and hanging) the wall paper, and Stan had the final word on car repairs. Household



**"I remember being moved  
when I heard Joe lead a table  
grace directed to 'our  
heavenly parent.'"**

---

chores were divided based on who had the heaviest work schedule at a given time. We did not consider any chores as women's or men's work.

While I was a nursing student, we all took turns cooking and cleaning. All three boys became good cooks in the process, and these skills were valued when they were in college or lived on their own.

Because our family was concerned about racial equality, we marched in demonstrations and worked with political candidates who we felt could help with race issues. One year, a woman, "Patience," was running for mayor of Oklahoma City. We knew and respected her. We felt she would do the most for integration and equal rights, so we worked in her campaign. Our sons helped leaflet the neighborhood and even made supper (probably beans and wieners) so I could do campaign telephoning. I heard a neighbor boy ask Joey why he had a bumper sticker on his bicycle for a woman. He answered, "Because she's the best one."

After Patience took office, a leading columnist in the Oklahoma City newspaper wrote an editorial joking about what a woman would do in the mayoral office. He wrote, "She is probably arranging the furniture, hanging curtains, and will come in real handy to sew a missing button on the senator's shirt." I wrote a response to his article saying he was sex-stereotyping a gifted person who happened to be a woman. He sent me and the mayor both a letter of apology. I respected him for his response.

The boys were aware that my picture was in the Oklahoma City newspaper picketing the recruiting station for Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies. We discussed judging people not by their appearance, but by personality and character.

A drama group in the city asked me to participate in a dramatic readers' theater. The play was called, "Jesus, the Feminist." It portrayed vignettes of Jesus' acceptance of women as equal and worthy people in the Kingdom of God. I don't know how often our sons saw this performance or attended our practices, but I'm sure they gathered there a broader view of Jesus' attitude toward women than they got in Sunday School.

Our family discussed the use of inclusive language. Scripture, prayers and children's books were changed to use nonsexist pronouns and nouns whenever possible. I remember being moved when I heard Joe lead a table grace directed to "our heavenly parent." When Nathan was graduating from nursing school, the class had chosen a poem for the program which included the word "man" meaning "humankind." He suggested the word be changed to be inclusive and found that although he was the only male in the class, he seemed to be the only one who had noticed the exclusive language.

Stan participated actively in child rearing. The boys soon learned their dad respected girls and women as equals. Since all three sons have married and have their own children, it's gratifying to see them pitch in as equal partners with their wives as homemakers and parents. Joe is a "house (and barn) husband" caring for two toddlers while Barb teaches school. Nate works afternoon shifts at the hospital so he can be with their sons most of the day while Greta works. Pete teaches school, so his parenting happens mostly evenings while Tracie works.

Last Christmas, one of our 7-year-old grandsons, Sammy, got a doll from his other grandma to help prepare him for a new sibling. He loved the doll and immediately named her "Mary Joseph." The grandchildren all enjoy playing with their toy kitchens as well as their trucks and balls. This indicates to me that although there may be genetic as well as learned differences in our preferences, the feminist values of equality and worth are being passed on to the next generation.

**Marlene Rufenacht Smucker lives in Arvada, Colo., with her husband, Stan. Marlene and Stan serve as co-pastors of the Arvada Mennonite Church. Marlene is also a nurse.**

by Mary Steiner

## My journey with my sons

As I write this, I have just come through a weekend of wedding activities with my fourth son, the last son to be married. It was an exciting weekend filled with lots of support from extended family and friends. I am filled with joy and a sense of satisfied accomplishment as I recall seeing my four sons standing up together at the wedding. My sons and I have traveled many roads together, with unexpected turns and rough spots, as well as smooth, scenic routes.

Perhaps this journey began even before I had any children, as I recall saying that if my children were all of one sex I would prefer raising boys. As it happened our first three biological children were boys. Then, as a result of our two overseas assignments doing short-term medical mission work, my husband and I chose to adopt a fourth child from one of the countries we had lived in. We had often talked about having a fourth child. These years of service helped us make that decision and confirmed our desire to provide a home for a child already in the world. The older boys were a part of this decision, and we spent nearly two years anticipating the arrival of this child.

At the beginning of the adoption process, we briefly contemplated requesting a daughter. However, when the final decision needed to be made, we wondered how well a girl would fit into the family at that point in our lives, and we soon decided on a fourth son. Matt joined the family at age 8. He immediately had three older brothers, ages 13, 15 and 17, who welcomed a younger brother and began teaching him the games, activities and sports they enjoyed.

The arrival of any new child into a home has to have its period of adjustment. As those first few weeks of excitement wore off, each boy had to establish, or reestablish, his place in the family. Matt's relationship with each of his brothers developed in different ways. Soon after Matt's arrival, our family moved to a third medical assignment of one year on a Navajo reservation.

Dan, our oldest son, chose to remain at home with friends, finishing his senior year of high school. Since he was leaving for college and getting married soon, his relationship with Matt became a fairly distant one. Doug more or less took over the "older" brother role then and became what I

termed Matt's "surrogate parent," developing a strong and lasting relationship. Jeff, whose role as "baby of the family" was changed when Matt came along, was more at a loss as to how to fit into this new relationship. He and Matt struggled with their brother roles through Jeff's high school years. However in recent years, perhaps due to their mutual interest in medicine, they are probably closer than any of the others. Matt chose Jeff as best man for his wedding.

For my husband and me, church attendance and involvement were always an important part of our lives. I have commented that I am most fulfilled when I am involved in some aspect of church life. My husband's mother strongly emphasized "service to others" with her children. Our sons grew up knowing that attending church and serving others were a natural part of our family life.

Because my husband and I chose to do short-term mission assignments early in our married life, each of the boys was born in a different country. A big part of our biological sons' growing-up years was spent traveling and living in another culture. One of the most difficult things we, as parents, faced was that in one of our assignments, the two older boys, from fourth to sixth grades, lived in a boarding school



**"My husband and I were excited each time a son was added to our family. Never has either of us wished for the daughter everyone around us seemed to think we 'needed.'"**

**"My experience of raising sons was definitely helped by the fact that their father taught them, by word and example, to respect me."**

for two years. This meant being separated from them a greater part of those two years, seeing them only for holidays and summer vacations. To Jeff, the youngest, I became not only mother but also teacher, playmate and friend since he remained at home with us with few other children near.

These experiences must have had some kind of positive influence on the boys, because as they grew older, each of them has chosen to do some form of voluntary service assignment. Two of them were in voluntary service two or more years, and the other two have served shorter terms. The three older ones and their wives are involved in their local church programs. Matt, just finishing a medical residency program, has not yet found a church home.

My husband and I were excited each time a son was added to our family. Never has either of us wished for the daughter everyone around us seemed to think we "needed." Through the years, family members and friends have wished for a girl for us. I have reiterated that I do not need a daughter to complete my happiness. Now that I also have grandsons I am again being reminded I "need" a granddaughter. I question this societal pressure, wondering why it is we as human beings lay our needs and desires onto others.

These statements appear to me to say I cannot possibly be satisfied with only sons and grandsons. I now have four wonderful daughters-in-law and am very grateful to the parents who raised these girls to become the lovely young women they are. I tell family and friends I am happy to have these women enter my life as grown adults. I believe it might be easier to accept daughters-in-law into one's family when there are no daughters. This is not always the case, of course, but when there is a good mother-daughter relationship already established, it appears to be more difficult to figure out how and where the newly acquired daughter-in-law fits into the picture. Each of my daughters-in-law has a different personality and seems to compliment the son of mine she married. For me, raising sons was easier than what I speculate raising daughters might have been.

Now that all of them are married, I appreciate seeing how the couples openly communicate with each other, how they share household responsibilities now that each of their wives is working outside the home, and how the two of them who have children take responsibility for helping to raise them. I appreciate seeing them make an effort to spend time with each of the boys and to find activities suitable for their sons' individual uniqueness.

I believe the respect my sons show to their families has a great deal to do with the respect my husband had for me. My experience of raising sons was definitely helped by the fact that their father taught them, by word and example, to respect me. My husband also displayed much respect for his mother.

Our journey was forever altered by a traumatic experience which occurred eight and a half years ago. My husband was struck by a car while jogging early one December morning a week before Christmas. He did not gain consciousness after the accident and died 27 hours later. He had been very active in the lives of his family and community so this was a jolt to many people. As we struggled through this grief experience, my sons, two daughters-in-law and I shared many hours trying once again to reestablish our roles in the family now that we were left without this person who was once such a huge part of our lives. Now, almost nine years later, I can say we are all stronger, more independent persons for having walked through this valley together.

A friend recently asked me if I am now feeling the "empty-nest syndrome" with my youngest son having just been married. After some thought I can say I feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment now that my work of raising sons is completed. I am satisfied with the choices they have made and feel much support and respect from each of them as they are now establishing homes of their own.

I am satisfied with the communication I have with each one. Dan writes to me faithfully and reports activities and happenings within his family. Doug and his wife suggest going out to eat occasionally, giving us an opportunity to catch up with each other's lives. Jeff and his wife call me on the phone a lot. Matt calls from time to time and continually expresses his gratitude to us as family for the "second chance" we have given him.

We are all very much still on the journey. We have weathered the rough spots and enjoyed the smoother, scenic routes. We look forward to what is ahead, knowing our faith in God and the strength we receive when needed will continue to accompany us.

**Mary Steiner is the mother of four sons, three biological and one adopted. She has four wonderful daughters-in-law and five grandsons. She has been active in Mennonite Church leadership for many years. At the local level she has been the congregational chair person and served on the administrative team and the pastoral care team. At the Ohio Conference level she has been on Leadership Commission and Executive Committee. She has taught elementary school and is now a receptionist at Adriel School in West Liberty, Ohio.**

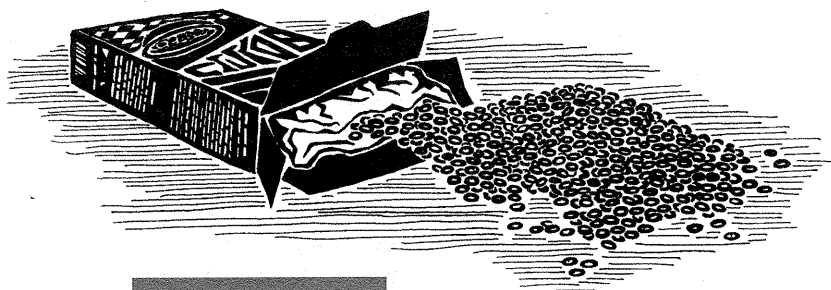
by Ruth Naylor

## Unspoken conversation at graduation

My son  
I see you  
As through a glass darkly  
Fearing  
    that the soil  
    from which you have  
grown  
    may not have been firm  
enough  
Or  
    that the nourishment  
    you have received  
    may not be adequate  
For the work  
This fast changing world  
Will demand.

My son  
I have wanted to water your soul  
    that you may stand strong  
    against those who would  
    uproot or trample you.  
I have wanted to focus the sunshine  
    or at least teach you  
    where you might find it  
    in life's varied days.

I hold you close in my heart—  
    and sometimes in my arms.  
Do you know  
    how much I care  
In spite of the inadequacies  
    I feel  
And the questions that remain  
Unanswered in my mind?



by Ruth Naylor

## The prize

"I found it, I found it,"  
    The boyish voice cried!  
And I, his mother,  
    Shrugged and sighed.

Though he had uncovered  
    The prize of Post's stocks,  
A task lay before us—  
    Put cereal back into box

Ruth Naylor is from Bluffton, Ohio. She is interim conference minister for Central District (General Conference).



---



## Off the cuff

We asked a number of women what they think is most important in raising nonsexist sons. A collection of some their answers follows:

**Ellen Hollinger, Lancaster, Pa.**

Teach them they don't always have to be in control—of themselves or of other people. Teach them they don't have to be tough.

**Melody Rupley, Akron, Pa.**

Read stories to them early and frequently. I'm amazed how often those stories come back to them. Choose stories that show gender roles not stereotypically defined, stories that show how foolish and serious are the consequences of sticking to prescribed gender roles. It also helps if parents model interchanging gender roles.

**Lorna Beth Shantz, Reinholds, Pa.**

The most significant factor is the behavior and attitude of their father or other male role model.

**Marsha Jones, Winnipeg, Mb.**

Respect yourself and never neglect the relationship with your son. That means talking with him and listening to him.

**Lois Neufeld, Lusaka, Zambia**

I detest generalizations. We talk about men's and women's roles, yet as a young person, I always felt out of place because I had gifts and ideas that fit more with society's description of a 'male' role. So, it seems very important to me to emphasize to our children the uniqueness and potential of individuals.

But I look at my own expectations: do I ask my daughter to do things that I won't ask my son to do because they are traditionally done by women? Do I encourage my son to go out and help my husband change the tire, but not encourage my daughter to learn the same skills?

At what point in their lives do we introduce them to the realities of the world? If, in our family, we make a conscious effort to arrange our lives according to gifts, talents, desires, and needs rather than gender roles, when do we tell them that in many families, the woman lives in the kitchen and the man fixes the sewer? Or don't we?

How do we raise children to be positive when we continually speak out against the injustices in society whether they be economic or sexist or racist or religious-based? Raising my son to be nonsexist means raising him to be positive towards the abilities and potential of all people.



by Anita Lichti

## Beloved son

Beloved son,  
you my first-born.  
Expecting you in anticipation and anxiety.  
Foreigner in a strange land,  
stranger in a foreign village,  
lonely and afraid,  
longing for your company,  
anxious for your well-being,  
I fed you with my worries.

Small child,  
beautiful and intelligent,  
fearful of leaving my side.  
I loved you, I cared for you,  
I had plans for you.

Teenager,  
obeying when I demanded,  
tolerating your siblings,  
thwarting my plans.  
Beautiful and intelligent,  
refusing diligence at school,  
mesmerizing others with your charm,  
others laughed when you laughed.  
I loved you,  
I worried about your future.

Twen,  
shaking off my concerns, my dominance.  
Beautiful, intelligent,  
giving employers headaches,  
giving friends laughter,  
giving policemen your driver's license.  
giving women your charm,  
giving me midnight calls from the police,  
giving hospitals emergency work to do.  
I tried so hard to love you.  
I tried so hard to change you.

Young father yourself,  
growing up.  
I learned late to let your withdrawing hand go,  
I learned late to leave you alone.  
I asked police to ask you, not me,  
I asked neighbors to stop making me responsible,  
I asked friends to support us all.  
I ask God to please never let you go,  
Beloved son.

Anita Lichti has lived in Schorndorf, Germany, for 27 years. She has two grown sons and a teenage daughter. She is a homemaker, English tutor and lay leader in the Stuttgart Mennonite Church.

### Women in ministry

**Michelle Krehbiel** was installed as assistant pastor at First Church, Hutchinson, Kan.

**Penny Frey** is youth pastor at First Church, Halstead, Kan.

**Katherine Pitts** is pastor at Salina (Kan.) Church.

**Robin Walton** was ordained and commissioned at Neil Avenue Church, Columbus, Ohio. Walton works with Doctors Hospital in Columbus.

**Kathy and Stan Shantz** are pastors at Trinity Church, Glendale, Ariz.

**Don and Jan Reinheimer** are co-pastors at Mountain Community Mennonite Church, Palmer Lake, Colo.

## News and verbs

Sarah Buhler, graduate of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, completed a **pastoral internship** at Osler Mennonite Church, Osler, Sask. She continues her studies at University of Winnipeg in women's studies.

Lara Hall was appointed **associate convention coordinator** for Orlando '97, Mennonite Church General Board offices, Elkhart, In.

Michelle Hershberger of Elkhart, Ind., is **project associate** of The Giving Project, an effort to promote stewardship in the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church.

Laura Schmidt Roberts of Fresno, Cal., has been appointed the Mennonite Brethren **representative to the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns**. Roberts teaches in the biblical and religious studies division at Fresno Pacific College.

Louise Buhler, MCC Vietnam country representative 1981-1987 and Bread for the World (Germany) program director 1987-1996, was honored by Vietnam's Minister of Education for **15 years of service** in the development of Vietnam's education. She is the first woman in the post-1975 period to receive such recognition. Buhler is from Warman, Sask., now living in Hanoi.

Goshen (Ind.) College seeks a person for the position of **academic dean** to begin July, 1, 1997. Send nominations, inquiries and applications to Shirley H. Showalter, president-elect. E-mail: shirleyhs@goshen.edu. Phone: 219-535-7503, Fax: 219 535-7660.

Susan Godshall has been appointed as **Africa director for overseas ministries** at Eastern Mennonite Missions, Salunga, Pa.

Karen Kenagy Perez has been named **director of La Casa de Maria y Marta**, San Antonio, Texas.

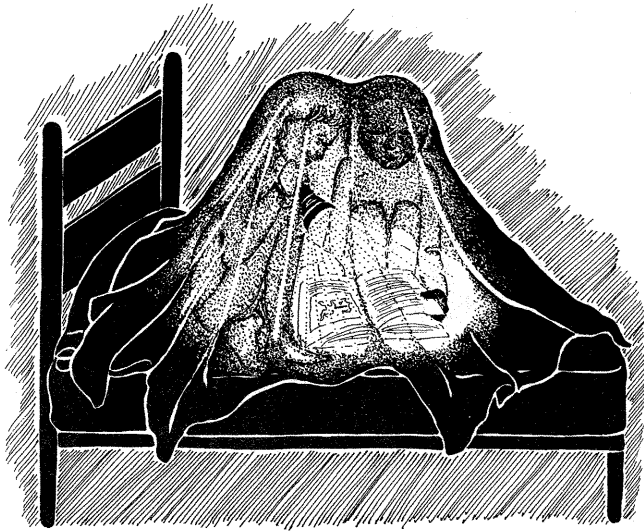
Jennifer Manley has been named **director of student activities and adviser to the Black Student Union** at Goshen (Ind.) College.

Kathy Glick of Millersburg, Ohio, a sophomore at Goshen (Ind.) College won **first place in the 1996 C. Henry Smith Oratorical Contest** with her speech "Weaving threads of peace in a pattern of war."

Carol Penner is **staff person in family violence concerns** for MCC Ontario. She took over the position from Esther Epp-Tiessen who continues with MCC Ontario as coordinator for Peace and Social Concerns.

*We welcome your submissions to "News and verbs." This column features a wide variety of news about the interests and activities of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women. We welcome news about groups and individuals.*

Illustrations in this issue were  
drawn by Teresa Pankratz of  
Chicago. Please do not  
reproduce without permission.



WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Gwen Groff. Layout by Beth Oberholtzer Design.

Subscription cost is \$12 U.S./\$15 Cdn. for one year or \$20 U.S./\$25 Cdn. for two years. Send all subscriptions, correspondence and address changes to Editor, MCC Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875. Canadian subscribers may pay in Canadian currency.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

21 South 12th Street  
PO Box 500  
Akron, PA  
17501-0500

by Ruth Naylor

## Overnight hideout

Under the covers  
In a deep warm cave  
Pirates hide  
in boys' pajamas.  
They beam their light  
Toward a dog-eared page.

Cookie crumbs crumble  
On sun-fragrant sheets  
As childhood feeds  
on its adventure.  
With these overtime points  
Who cares if they sleep?

2nd Class

**POSTAGE  
PAID**

at Akron, PA